

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 53 | Number 4 (Fall 1994)

pps. 398-399

Chasing Rainbows: a Recollection of the Great Plains, 1921-1975

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1994 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"Chasing Rainbows: a Recollection of the Great Plains, 1921-1975." *The Annals of Iowa* 53 (1994), 398-399.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9863>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Chasing Rainbows: A Recollection of the Great Plains, 1921-1975, by Gladys Leffler Gist, edited by James Marten. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993. x, 157 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, appendix, bibliography. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PAMELA RINEY-KEHRBERG, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

In *Chasing Rainbows: A Recollection of the Great Plains, 1921-1975*, Gladys Leffler Gist chronicles her life as a farm woman in the middle years of the twentieth century. Her recollections, written originally as yearly summaries of her life, were edited for publication by her granddaughter's husband, historian James Marten.

Gist's account is a somewhat unusual one. She and her husband, Raymond Gist, were tenant farmers. In the course of their married life, they lived on nine different farms in Iowa and South Dakota. The family weathered the turbulent years of the mid-twentieth century, enduring the Great Depression, sending sons off to fight in the Second World War, and watching children leave the farm in the years thereafter. Although the stereotype of the tenant farming family is of impoverished people eking out a meager living, the Gists lived a somewhat different life. True, at points the family lived in poverty, but in the long run, the Gists were moderately successful and succeeded in giving their children decent lives and college educations. Their experience may have been more typical than historians have generally assumed.

Gist's account is charming, and sometimes heartbreaking. While the family was ultimately successful in establishing a profitable farming operation, the journey to that point was a long and hard one. Many years they found themselves on the edge of disaster. For instance, they lost a home and all its contents to fire, and spent years trying to recover from that devastating and complete loss. She relates such experiences in a matter-of-fact tone, as one accustomed to hardships. Given the difficulties that the family endured, some bitterness would have been understandable, but Gist viewed her life as a happy struggle, rather than a sad one.

The editor, James Marten, provides the reader with valuable family information, making sense of Gist's writing. There is a substantial introduction, prefatory material to each section of the memoir, and considerable explanatory footnoting. He largely left the story in Gist's own words, making very few editorial additions or deletions. The result is a highly readable text, and one that undoubtedly reflects Gist's own concerns. Marten also includes a substantial bibliography and a family tree. He delves into scholarship on the history of rural

women in an attempt to put Gist's experiences into context. This he does rather successfully, although some of his material is not as current as it could be.

For those interested in the history of the upper Midwest, agriculture, or rural women, this book is definitely worth reading. It provides an afternoon of enjoyable reading and is also useful as primary source material for the study of rural women's lives. Read in tandem with other firsthand accounts, Gist's recollections help to round out our historical understanding of farm women's concerns and experiences in the middle decades of this century. *Chasing Rainbows* is a heartfelt and heartwarming account.

Herbert Hoover and Harry S. Truman: A Documentary History, by Timothy Walch and Dwight M. Miller. Worland, WY: High Plains Publishing Company, 1992. xvi, 278 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, index. \$29.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DONALD J. LISIO, COE COLLEGE

Rarely have ex-presidents from opposing political parties become friends; rarer still have they cooperated in the execution of important public policy. Franklin D. Roosevelt totally excluded his predecessor, Herbert Hoover, from his administration. But the exile ended when Harry Truman called on Hoover to help overcome the great famine that threatened Europe immediately after the end of World War II. Hoover's skills in successfully mastering a similar threat after World War I had earned him the title "The Great Humanitarian," and Truman was correct in assuming that Hoover's skills were still as sharp as ever. Truman was so impressed by Hoover's leadership that he next asked Hoover to make a tour assessing the famine threat to one-half billion people throughout the world. Again Hoover answered the call. But Truman would not allow Hoover to rest. Determined to bring greater order and efficiency out of the numerous overlapping government agencies created during the crisis of World War II, he placed Hoover at the head of what came to be called the Hoover Commission. Once again success crowned their cooperation. Congress adopted 70 percent of the Hoover Commission's 273 recommendations, and created the General Services Administration to ensure future efficiency and savings.

This fascinating story, told primarily through the judicious choice of key letters between the two men, becomes even more interesting in a chapter titled "Not Quite Friends." Here one finds the clash of

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.